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Book review: *Chiese e nationes a Roma: dalla Scandinavia ai Balcani. Secoli XV–XVIII*, a cura di Antal Molnár, Giovanni Pizzorusso, Matteo Sanfilippo, Viella, Roma 2017, pp. 254

In the past decade, interest in Rome's national churches has spawned a number of new research projects and publications presenting the city in many humanistic perspectives as a cosmopolitan, universalistic and transnational city. In March 2012, the Institute for Italian History of the Middle Ages and the Institute of the History of Mediterranean Europe organised a conference titled *Comunità straniere a Roma 1377–1870*, aimed at initiating a wide-scale research project with the involvement of academies and research institutes in Italy and other countries. An international group of researchers was established in the same year in order to implement the project *Roma communis patria* (*Le chiese nazionali a Roma tra medioevo ad età moderna*) at Bibliotheca Hertziana, managed by Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte (Max Plack Institute for Art History), which organised its first large research conference in 2013 together with the German Historical Institute.¹ An outcome of the conference was a volume of essays dated 2015, which in fact was issued in 2016.² The main subject of the research was the history of Roman

1. <https://www.biblherzt.it/en/roma-communis-patria> (accessed Sep 2020).

2. *Identità e rappresentazione. Le chiese nazionali a Roma, 1450–1650*, a cura di A. Kolter, S. Kubersky-Piredda, in collaborazione con T. Daniels, Roma 2015 [2016!].

communities between 1450 and 1650, their collective identities manifested in architecture and artistic design of churches. At the same time, the Belgian Academy in Rome initiated a research project titled *Le modèle musical des églises nationales à Rome à l'époque baroque*. Last but not least, in April 2014 and October 2015 the Tor Vergata University held two seminars titled *Venire a Roma / Restare a Roma* and *Forestieri e stranieri fra Cinque e Settecento*, and the Spanish School of History and Archaeology in Rome organised the debate *I forestieri a Roma tra '500 e '600*.³ Hungarian mediaevalist Antal Molnár, director of the Hungarian Academy in Rome since 2011, took a similar initiative, in collaboration with Giovanni Pizzorusso and Matteo Sanfilippo. The conference was planned with the intention to investigate in historical and conceptual terms the functioning of churches and national hospices ran by the Holy See in peripheral Europe, from Scandinavia through Scotland, Hungary, Poland, to Albania, Greece and Croatia. The subject of the churches of great "nations" (the Spanish, the French) or the churches of Italian cities was omitted. The art of no longer existing churches or churches of little significance to the history of art was also given little coverage. The present volume is an outcome of a conference held on 8th April 2016 in the Hungarian Academy in Rome. As emphasized by Molnár in the introduction, the texts published in the volume address the meaning of the concept of a "national church," the way in which it evolved from the 15th to the 18th century, as well as the definition of the term *natio*. Of a total of thirteen essays, two deal with the above questions from a general perspective, while the remaining eleven are dedicated to individual "nations," i.e. English, Scottish, Irish, Swedish, Flemish, German, Polish, Bohemian, Hungarian, Croatian, Albanian, Corsican, Ruthenian and Greek.

The first author, Domenico Rocciolo, discusses national churches and their hospices in the context of the Roman diocese, their role in pastoral ministry, especially jurisdictional matters related to the influence of ecclesiastical authorities on the way in which the institutions functioned. He rightly points out that not all newcomers or settlers in the city stayed in hospices; they often chose professional, devotional (confraternities) or charitable communities (rather than national ones). Matteo Binasco referred to the community of nations from regions situated in relative proximity to one another: England,

3. *Venire a Roma, restare a Roma. Forestieri e stranieri fra Quattro e Settecento*, a cura di S. Cabibbo, A. Serra, Roma 2017.

Scotland and Ireland, the inhabitants of which were partly Protestants. The English and the Scots set up their own institutions rather quickly, as opposed to the Irish, who were considerably less numerous in comparison to the English and the Scots, and whose first national institutions in Rome included Franciscan missionary college Sant'Isidoro and the Irish College. The subject of the Swedish is dealt with by Anu Raunio.⁴ Residents of the country where the Catholics were no longer allowed to practice their religion, due to the ban imposed by the state, gathered in the hospice, where they could convert to Catholicism (hence its popular name, "the Converts' Hospice"). Many of them were unable to return to their country and for this reason they formed ties with the court of Christina, Queen of Sweden, a convert to Catholicism (1654), worked as craftsmen or seamen, or enlisted as soldiers in papal service. Of particular interest is the essay by Joahn Ickx on the Flemish hospice at San Giuliano's church. The author managed to determine the actual date when the hospice was established (1213) and presented the complex issue of the term *nationes* in reference to Lodovico Guicciardini's question of 1567, namely who is a Fleming, a Hollander, a Dutchman (a *Niederdeutscher*), a Walloon or a Belgian, and contemplating whether Flanders is *pars pro toto* of the term "the Flemish." The author cites B. De Groff's extremely interesting finding that the term "Flemish" was used in Rome in reference to the birthplace in all seventeen provinces in spite of religious wars and the separation of the northern and the southern part of the former Netherlands.⁵ The most characteristic example given by the author is that of a painter who referred to himself as a person from "Utrecht in the Flemish country under Holland reign" (p. 73). Describing the German church Santa Maria dell'Anima, Tobias Daniels comes to similar conclusions as his predecessor, namely that the idea of a "national church" in the analysed period is immensely difficult to define even in a city like Rome, a peculiar laboratory of identities. Despite its German roots, the church attracted the faithful of various origins and was international in character, whereas its relations with the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation were often ambivalent. Daniels is critical in his

4. The text is based on her doctoral dissertation: *Conversioni al cattolicesimo a Roma tra Sei e Settecento. La presenza degli scandinavi nell'Ospizio dei Convertendi*, Turku 2009.

5. B. De Groof, *Natie en nationaliteit. Benamingsproblematiek in San Giuliano dei Fiamminghi te Rome (17e–18e eeuw)*, "Bulletin de l'Institut historique Beige de Rome/ Bulletin van het Belgisch Historisch Instituut te Rome" 58 (1988), pp. 87–148.

view of the idea of the "German" community, from an ethnic and language community in the 15th century through a community torn apart by the Reformation in the following century (not all Germans in Rome were Catholic), to a community claimed by the political authorities, which accentuated the diversity, in this case the mixing of Germans and the Flemish on their common political territory.

Hieronim Fokciński very briefly outlines the history of the Polish hospice without any reference to archival material; instead, he uses commonly available popular-science publications. Remarkably, the author commits several errors, e.g. claiming that St. Stanislaus was murdered by Boleslas III Wrymouth or that Stephan Bathory was succeeded by Jan Kazimierz. Bohemian and Hungarian hospices, i.e. linked to countries which were part of the Habsburg empire, had more humble representation and were less organised. Tomas Parma writes about the altar dedicated to St. Wenceslaus in St. Peter's Basilica, and makes a connection between the establishment of the hospice and the visits of Emperor Charles IV to Rome (1355, 1368), albeit the number of pilgrims coming to Rome from the Kingdom of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia was far from impressive. With the rise of Hussitism and fewer pilgrims coming from Bohemia, the hospice Via Banchi Vecchi was taken over by Germans, and then by Italians. In the 16th century the hospice lost its national Bohemian character and part of its income was allocated to the Jesuit College in Prague, and the institution became part of Ospedale Santa Trinità dei Pellegrini. The collapse of the institution was caused by small number of pilgrims coming to Rome. According to the legend, the Hungarian hospice, discussed by Antal Molnár, was set up at the initiative of King Stephen I. It was a clear sign of political legitimization and representation of the nascent Hungarian state in the international arena. Nevertheless, as opposed to other nations, it did not gain legal autonomy and suitable conditions for functioning permanently. It was situated near St. Peter's Basilica, at S. Stefano Minore Church, and functioned throughout the Middle Ages, managed by Canons of St. Peter's rather than Hungarians. It was the former who provided spiritual care for the pilgrims from land of Saint Stephen's Crown. Hungarians never had a national church of adequate legal status in Rome. With time, the temple lost most of its function of a national church, and S. Stefano's feast was held on the day of the early Christian martyr instead of the day of the patron saint of Hungary. Finally, it was pulled down to make room for the new sacristy for the basilica (1776).

Jadranka Neralić presents the role of the Illyrian hospice in the emergence of the Croat nation. Inhabiting the borderlands of Europe, Croats and

Dalmatians — called *schiaconi* or *ilirici* from the 15th to the 17th centuries — received S. Girolamo's church from Pope Sixtus V (1589). The Pope appointed a chapter in the church, which was the only national chapter in the Eternal City. The hospice's system and administration was modelled on the hospices of the greatest nations, except that Croats did not have an autonomous country, and were scattered between the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Venice and the Republic of Ragusa. Under such circumstances, it is little wonder that even Croats were not completely sure who to admit, and which criteria (topographical, linguistic or religious criteria) to apply. The door of S. Girolamo dei Schiaconi's hospice were open only to Catholics from Croatia, Dalmatia, Slovenia and Bosnia. The community of Southern Slavic Catholics was visible in Rome and represented by many distinguished members of lay courts and ecclesiastical hierarchy. As evident from the analysis of many testaments, their attachment to their place of origin (native country) was as important as the one to the positions they held in Rome. Interestingly, the Pope himself approved of an iconography which expressed his commitment to the evangelization of Europe.

Anna Esposito presents Albanian (San Crisogonio) and Corsican (Santa Maria de Puteo) hospices, i.e. ran by nations which she describes in the title of her work as *difficile*. In Rome, they were perceived as people from lower social strata, mainly as criminals, and in the city they formed closed enclaves inaccessible to strangers. The Albanians' ties to their homeland had been severed for well-known historical reasons.

Laurent Tatarenko outlines the history of the Ruthenian Hospice of SS. Sergio e Bacco, treated as a national church by the Poles and as *genthe Rutenus natione Polonorum* by the Ruthenians. The church came into being through the effort of Polish King Sigismund III, for the benefit of Greek-Catholic Basilian monks from the Republic of Poland. Even its liturgy was held in accordance with the liturgy of the Catholic Church, and the worship of the miraculous painting of S. Maria del Pascolo (a version of the image of Virgin Mary in Żyrowice) was publicised in Rome, particularly in Polish S. Stanisław's Church. For the Holy See, the hospice became a key point in its missionary policy in the East. A significant role was held by its rector, who was elected from among the representatives of both provinces of Uniate Basilians.

Particular complexity characterised the history and identity of Sant'Atanasio dei Greci church, analysed by Cesare Santus, e.g. on the basis of the register of denominations from Sant'Uffizio. The author defines what basically constitutes a closed church in terms of denomination rather

than birthplace, since the pilgrims listed in the register were of various origins (Italian-Albanian inhabitants of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, Ruthenians from Ukraine, some Illyrians as well as Syrian Melkites), i.e. people from various ethnic groups and speaking different languages. He also investigates the community of Greek converts striving to find their place in the Holy See's charitable system and analyses the term "Greek," which on the one hand defined the inhabitants of the Levant, on the other hand was used in reference to people from the Slavic realms or the Middle-Eastern Byzantine Rite.

The last text, by Giovanni Pizzarusso and Matteo Sanfilippo, provides a summary of the aforementioned discussions and anticipates likely future research. As previously mentioned, the purpose of the book is to demonstrate the unique character of minor nations situated peripherally in Catholic Europe, while purposefully omitting major groups, especially those who were in the domain of the Spanish Crown, the French Monarchy and the Habsburg Empire. The authors underline the complexity of the subject of national churches and propose new terminology such as *chiesa rituali* ("church of a religious denomination") instead of the term "national church" when referring to Roman churches in which eastern Uniates re-united with Rome (from the Holy See's perspective) assembled. The Eternal City, as emphasized by the researchers, welcomed even the members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, in particular refugees from occupied Balkans, part of whom converted, while some still remained faithful to the Greek rite. The Holy See's desire to control them was accompanied by a sincere intention to protect them and fulfil their spiritual needs (p. 227). Rome was also inhabited by Jews, Muslims, and sometimes even Protestants, who were under close surveillance of the Holy Office, yet a blind eye was turned to their presence for purely business, commercial, tourist or even political reasons. Protestants constituted a unique group; even if they were apprehended, they could count on papal protection, as long as they declared their intention to convert, as recently described by Irene Fosi.⁶ A stark opponent of Protestantism, secretary of Congregazione di Propaganda Fide Urbano Cerri in his report on the state of the missions worldwide to Pope Innocent XI complained that there was no other place with such a vast number of heretics and schismatics as Rome (p. 228). The researchers acknowledged institutional changes in the 16th century, primarily the emergence

6. I. Fosi, *Convertire lo straniero. Forestieri e Inquisizione a Roma in età moderna*, Roma 2011.

of the national college, a new institution introduced by Pope Gregory XIII, aimed at the formation of national missionaries, the students of which were supposed to exercise apostolate in their own countries or communities. From 1623 the colleges, ran by Jesuits, fell under the jurisdiction of Congregazione di Propaganda Fide. Missionaries from a multitude of countries which did not have their own college in Rome were taught in City College Congregazio di Propaganda Fide built in 1627 near Piazza di Spagna (according to Francesco Borromini's design). In contrast to previous cosmopolitan system, the Holy See's initiative after reforms introduced by the Council of Trent was an expression of a universalist tendency and new paradigms of the mission of Christianisation. For scantily represented Catholic nations, this created greater opportunity to manifest and reinforce their own identities.

As noted by Antal Molnár in the introduction to the publication, although research on national churches in Rome is characterised by abundance of publications (mainly historical and historical-artistic), at the same time there is complete lack of comparative studies which share the same interpretative framework, for example between early medieval *scholae* and churches of non-European nations in the 20th century. Full-scale comparative research is conspicuously missing even for complex monarchies: Spanish, French or the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, which readily used national churches for their own presentation. Issued by Viella publishing house, the publication of Istituto Balassi and the Hungarian Academy in Rome, is an important contribution to the development of research on national churches in Rome. It contains texts which refer to hospices and churches of nations of poor or non-existent state structure and disputes concerning their national identity, which seems an important voice in the debate on the phenomenon of proto-nationalism in the early modern period.